



Beach Day by the zesty lemon

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Summary: Steve and Max have a heart to heart. Dustin and Mike get their asses handed to them. (Some Lumax and Mileven fluff, but mostly Steve being a damn good baby sitter.)

Beach Day

A/N: This falls somewhere between my other two stories: "A Different Kind of Code Red" and "You Can't Choose Family". So the overall order is:

- 1) Accidental Code Red
- 2) A Different Kind of Code Red
- 3) Beach Day
- 4) You Can't Choose Family

Enjoy! :)

Steve, it turns out, was weak to the puppy dog eyes.

He found this out one morning when Dustin, Lucas, Mike, El, Will and Max piled into the police station and cornered him at his desk, excitedly talking over one another. It was Lucas who was elected to explain their idea once he got them calmed down enough to get out a coherent sentence.

"We want to go to the beach." Lucas explained, "but we don't have a car. We thought you could drive us and come for beach day too."

The six teens cooked up the idea the day before. There was a beach not too far from Hawkins, maybe an hour drive each way and Dustin got it in his head that Steve could chauffeur them to and from said beach.

When Steve said nothing, Lucas continued. "We would leave early in the morning and spend the whole day. We'll help chip in for gas and everything."

"And you wouldn't have to worry about food!" Dustin added hopefully, "we'll have you covered. I know Wednesday's your day off, and you like the beach, right?"

Steve mulled it over. A beach day would be fun... but he had a lot to do on his day off; figuring out how to be a real adult, for example. Starting his new job at the station paired with leaving home and learning to live on his own, it had been a stressful learning curve. He was long overdue for a break, but he didn't have the time to relax right now.

He was about to say no when Max Mayfield, zoomer extraordinaire, decided to play dirty.

"I haven't been to a beach since I left California." Max remarked offhandedly, with sad sigh that may or may not have been faked.

With the five other puppy-dog eyes drilling into him, Steve cracked under the pressure.

"Fine." He sighed, "but we leave when I say so, okay?"

The teens nodded eagerly, happy to accept his conditions before breaking out into excited chatter. (Steve pretended not to see Dustin subtly high-five Max.)

"One more thing," Steve realized abruptly, "you have to clear it with your parents."

"We did." Mike said hastily.

Steve blinked in surprise and glanced towards Hopper's office. Sure enough, Hopper stood at the window, smirking into his coffee cup, shaking his head at how fast Steve folded. Apparently Hopper had known about the kids' plans, but let the little shits blindside him, the bastard.

Steve scowled at Hopper before turning back to the kids.

"Okay. Now scram, I've got work to do."

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Wednesday morning came far too early, but the sun was shining, the sky was bright and blue, and as Steve left the trailer to pick up the first of the party, he couldn't help but feel like it was going to be a

good day.

Somehow, they managed to fit all six teens into his car and their beach day stuff without pinching a limb off in the door. It was a squishy car ride, but the tight quarters didn't dampen any of their spirits.

Dustin chattered his ear off the entire drive, but Steve was in too good a mood to mind.

About an hour outside of Hawkins, Will was the first to spot the sign.

"There it is!" Will exclaimed excitedly, pointing to their left.

Steve pulled in to where Will pointed and brought the vehicle to a smooth stop in the sandy parking lot of "Pine Lake".

Pine Lake was by no means the ocean, but it did have a nice little public beach. Often times families from Hawkins would come and make a day of it during the weekends, even Steve remembered coming here when he was younger with his parents.

Luckily, the beach was empty today, so they had their pick of where to set up.

The teens decided on a nice, partially shaded spot near a tree and hastily set up camp. Just as soon as their bags were down and the towels set up, they were off! Leaving Steve to happily set out his towel and begin his full day of lounging in the sand.

It was hard to ask for a better way to spend his day.

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"Harrington." Max greeted about an hour and a half later, dropping down next to him gracelessly.

Steve nodded at her in greeting and closed his eyes once more, enjoying the warmth of the sun against his skin.

It was quiet for a few minutes, the sounds of the water lapping at the shore of the beach, the cries of the seagulls and the laughter of the

others playing in the water sounded soothingly faraway.

"Can I ask you something?"

Steve froze at the unexpected apprehension lacing Max's tone. Peeling one eye open, Steve studied Max from behind his sunglasses and noticed she was fidgeting with her hair. It was so un-Max like; it was a little alarming.

"Sure Mayfield," Steve tried to keep the concern out of his voice, knowing that if she sensed anything she might spook, "what's up?"

Max was quiet for another minute, her gaze lingering on her friends, and specifically, Lucas. He hadn't seen them speak much today, there had definitely been an undercurrent of tension in the car ride over, but he'd been unable to make the connection because Dustin had been yapping his ear off the entire way.

"Trouble in paradise?" Steve prompted.

Max jumped a little and shot him a look. He held her annoyed glare, and after a moment she sighed and slumped.

"Maybe." She muttered, picking up a small twig and lazily drawing a figure eight in the sand.

He didn't rush her. Max would open up if she wanted to, and he wasn't going anywhere.

Eventually, she seemed to be able to put her thoughts into words. She looked up from the sand and watched her friends once more before she started to speak what was on her mind.

"How do you show someone you care about them?"

Steve's eyebrows shot into his luscious hairline.

"What?"

That definitely wasn't a question he'd expected.

Pink bloomed across Max's cheeks, but she ploughed on.

"I mean—I think I like Lucas, but I'm not good at the dating stuff like those two sickening love birds over there," she swept her arm in the others' general direction.

Steve followed the gesture and sure enough, Mike and El were sitting slightly away from Dustin, Lucas and Will, heads bowed close together, hands gently held between them as Wheeler stared at Eleven like she'd just offered him the entire universe on a platter. Clearly, they were lost in their own little world.

That's why Mike didn't see his friends sneaking up behind them with a huge bucket of water.

Steve rolled his eyes at Mike's high-pitched shriek of indignity as Dustin, Lucas and Will dumped the bucket of water over his head. El had probably been in on it, because she scurried away from Mike just in time, leaving him the only one sopping wet and sputtering.

Steve and Max watched as Mike recovered from his shock and began to chase his friends, until he got a mischievous smirk on his face and promptly switched targets, smooshing a previously dry El against his soaked chest.

El's squeals melted into giggles as Mike began to pepper her face with kisses, still tight in his embrace.

"Get a room!" Dustin groaned, promptly earning him a small psychic push into the water—and the fight was on again.

Admittedly, in the face of such hideously adorable affection, Steve could see why it might be a little intimidating. He wasn't that much of a PDA guy himself, but Mike and El's relationship was so much deeper than just public affection. It was unnerving to see two kids so young, love each other with such absolute certainty. It wasn't clear if Mike and El had dropped the "L-bomb" yet, but it was glaringly obvious how deeply they cared for one another.

"I'm not really sure if we're dating, but I just want to show him that I care..." She shrugged uncomfortably. "I'm really new at this."

"Do you want to be dating?" Steve asked carefully.

Max took a moment to mull it over.

"I think so."

Steve fell back on his go-to, thinking of how he'd initially attracted all the girls in high school. "See the trick is, Max, play it cool. Pretend that you don't care." He said smoothly, leaning back, hands clasped behind his head.

He wasn't expecting her to laugh.

Steve frowned and looked over at her. "What?"

Max stopped laughing when she saw that he was actually annoyed. Her brows raised.

"Oh. You were serious." There was a beat of silence and then, "it's just that, you're really good at following your own advice."

Steve's frown deepened.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Max rolled her eyes and turned to face him a little more properly. "You say to pretend that you don't care, but you do a damn poor job of it when it comes to us." She was grinning now, and Steve couldn't help the irritation that trickled down his spine.

Max was clearly in on some kind of joke and it bothered him that he wasn't in on it.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"You're a show – er not a teller, Harrington. That's why I came to you about this."

Steve opened and closed his mouth at least five times before he was able to respond.

"*Excuse* me?" He whipped off his sunglasses indignantly, "I am not a show-er."

Max grinned. "Right."

"Name one thing I did to show I love you little shits." Steve complained.

Max's grin widened. "Whoa Harrington, I didn't even mention the 'L' word. But it's nice to know."

He shot her an unimpressed look. She was entirely unaffected.

"What about that time you brought Dustin his lunch when he forgot it at home?"

"It was on my patrol route that day, he's a growing guy." Steve supplied stubbornly.

"What about last week, when you bought Will a new sketchbook because he was out?"

"Early birthday present."

Max snickered. "Will's birthday isn't until March."

"Fine. Early Christmas present."

"What about when you saved El at the arcade from," she paused and did her best imitation of Dustin, "*Hawkins Social Suicide*?"

He didn't have an answer for that. Technically Steve had gone to hell and back for them in that afternoon, having journeyed into the notorious Aisle Three at Melvald's to buy El some lady supplies.

At his hesitation, Max punched him in the arm. "Just admit it Harrington, you care about us."

He didn't know what to say to that.

The last few years were a blur of craziness, monsters and somehow just managing to scrape through the situation alive. He'd been through a lot with these kids, but his involvement could have ended after that crazy night when they'd torched the demo dogs.

But...

It didn't.

It might have ended, if Dustin hadn't visited him at the hospital when he was recovering from that same night.

Maybe that would have been the end of it too, but for some reason Steve volunteered to drive Dustin to the Snowball.

After that, somehow, he kept getting involved with them.

Upside Down shit aside, he'd been there for Eleven's injuries when she wiped out on her bike and again when Dustin and Lucas called him to the arcade...

But caring for these little shits?

Steve scanned the beach again, watching their horseplay. Lucas, Dustin, Will, Mike and El were playing chicken, with El and Mike taking on Dustin and Lucas. Will remained as the impartial referee.

They were pretty neck in neck until El pulled a dirty trick and used her powers to flip Luca's feet out from under him, sending both him and Dustin flailing into the water.

A moment later Will held up a yellow card (a piece of paper he'd hastily scribbled yellow) and El was benched.

"You may have a point." Steve begrudgingly admitted, coming back to their conversation, "but that stays between you and me, Mayfield. Can't have those shit heads knowing that I care."

Max rolled her eyes, fighting a genuine smile at his admission. The smile faded somewhat as she remembered the real topic at hand.

"I don't want to mess this up. My parents...aren't exactly the best example."

Steve nodded thoughtfully, thinking how he should have been more like Max when he was dating Nancy. "Neither are mine."

He could see the questioning look in Max's eyes and elaborated before she could ask him.

"My dad goes on all these business trips and my mom goes with him to make sure he doesn't get into *trouble*. I used to laugh about it. Not anymore."

She nodded, looking apprehensive and thoughtful all at once.

"But hey," he said gently, "we're not our parents."

Max turned to him with such a hopeful gaze it left him a little stunned to know that his word mattered to her so much. Max was better than that bullshit advice he'd once believed in. He'd have to talk with Dustin sometime too—you didn't pretend not to care about those you actually cared about. Instead, Steve opted to voice something aloud he'd been thinking about for a long time about his failed relationship with Nancy Wheeler. The thought of Nancy always left an ache in his chest, but he wouldn't have traded the time he had with her for anything.

"Just... don't hold back. If you want to show someone that you care, you show them. No bullshit." Steve said honestly.

Max nodded solemnly, and he could see his words struck a chord in her. "No bullshit."

"Now go tell Sinclair how you feel and seal it with a kiss or something." Steve teased, trying to inject levity back into the heavy atmosphere their conversation left lingering.

It worked, because Max went bright red. She slugged him in the shoulder in retaliation before saying:

"Thanks Steve."

She meant it. Wholly and sincerely.

"Anytime, Mayfield."

A shadow crossed the sand in front of them, making the two look up in surprise.

"Hey." Lucas greeted nervously, eyeing Max and Steve. "Is everything okay?"

They could see Mike, Dustin, Will and El a little way away, attempting to look like they weren't trying to overhear every word being said. The concern on their faces was touching, even as they did a poor job at pretending otherwise.

Steve recovered first. "We were just talking about how you two," he gestured between Max and Lucas, "could totally wipe the floor with Wheeler and Henderson." He made sure to say it extra loud and sure enough, it had the desired effect.

Dustin made a noise of indignation, and Mike called tauntingly: "I'd like to see them try!"

Lucas still looked concerned, his dark gaze flitting to Max worriedly. Even if he didn't believe Steve, he wasn't the type to press it.

His concern vanished when Max gave him her usual cocky grin a moment later. "Let's go kick their sorry asses." She said confidently, holding out her hand.

Lucas grinned and hauled her up without another doubt. "You got it."

"Watch this, Harrington." Max called over her shoulder, swaggering towards their friends.

Steve did as told, feeling a strange mix of pride and contentedness as Max climbed on Lucas's shoulders and Dustin onto Mike's (after some squabbling).

Will counted them down, grinning. "On your marks... get set... GO!"

It was over embarrassingly quickly.

Max got a firm grip onto Dustin's hands and in an unexpected feat of strength and ferocity, ripped him right off Mike's shoulders. Dustin flailed and tried to recover, but took Mike down with him.

By far, it was the *most* decisive chicken fight victory Steve had ever seen.

El and Will burst out into startled cheers as Mike and Dustin came up spluttering. A moment later they all dissolved into laughter.

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The rest of the day was spent playing, lounging and having beach fun.

After way too many rounds of chicken fights, (unsurprisingly, it was El and Max who made the deadliest team) they decided to call the chicken fights to an end when El innocently told Max that she made a nice "top".

Max nearly choked on her tongue, Lucas and Will went pink and Dustin almost passed out from laughing too much. It was left to a red-faced Mike to explain what that particular phrasing could also mean to a curious El.

After that, Max and El buried Dustin in the sand, while Will took a break to sketch out some of the scenery and Mike and Lucas continued swimming, racing out to the buoy and back again.

At one point, they all had a lunch and then supper, thanks to the overflowing cooler and pack Mrs. Henderson had been so kind to pack.

Steve had to admit; it was a great beach day.

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Towards the end of the day, when Max and Lucas decided to take a walk—alone, Steve quickly distracted the rest of the party so they could have a moment together before anyone could volunteer that they all go.

An hour later, when they were all packed up in the car and ready to head home, Steve, along with Dustin, Mike, Will and El, pretended not to notice Max reach out and hold Lucas's hand in her own.

A/N: (Tries to write a multi-chapter Mileven centred fic...Aaaaaaaand it's a Steve Harrington and his six kids one-shot instead!)

I realized I published this on my AO3, but totally dropped the ball for
! Hope you enjoyed :)